

Education in Africa for the Twenty First Century: Perspectives for Change

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Abstract:

Education in its widest sense is at cross roads of societal development and change. The key to understanding the situation of education is to recognize that it is neither an isolated phenomenon nor a dependent one; it receives and contributes, it creates and created. It is at its creative best when it is interwoven with the total socio-human knowledge environment of the future. Therefore, meaningful socio-economic development without the right type and appropriate quality of education is a dictum because it is an indispensable safeguard for the full development of the human personality and the environment. However in view of the 21st century, there is need to reposition education to measure up with occurrences of global development as a result of knowledge. Therefore this work reviews the knowledge-based economy, the 21st century economy and education for change in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Keyword: Twenty First Century, Education, Knowledge, Economy, Global

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Introduction

Education continues to remain the most outstanding development priority in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The core purpose of education according to Okediran (2003) is human development such that an educated person can acquire relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interest as would enable him/her become the subject of development. All things being equal, an educated person who is well or relevantly positioned in the socio-economic, cultural and political milieus is expected to be more valuable assets to society than another individual who is illiterate and perhaps ignorant to a great extent because of the diminishing expanse and relevance of his/her knowledge.

Education is expected at this moment to respond to contemporary challenges facing the Africa continent. However Nigeria in view of the 21st century is striving to cope with numerous challenges many of which are susceptible to illiteracy, misappropriation, political instability, terrorism, climate change and the likes. In African recently, HIV/Aids, Ebola, terrorism and poverty have remained dominant issues on the countries agenda for development. Therefore in the struggle against these society woes and many more, education in general, is expected to equip Africa very significantly to respond to numerous economic, social, political, institutional and international pressures with necessary transformations for relevance in the 21st century.

The Knowledge Based Economy

The rapid move over recent decades to a global knowledge economy, driven by constantly evolving information and communication technologies, has created significant economic and social opportunities. According to Kozma (2005), it is equally creating enormous challenges confronting countries with the need to rethink their educational and social systems to participate in this global knowledge economy. Therefore taking a clue from Obanya (2014), there is the need for students to leave school with a deeper understanding of school subjects with relevant skills needed to respond to an unbounded but uncertain 21st century-skills. This will help them to apply the knowledge, think critically, collaborate, communicate, solve problems, and be creative as well as to learn continually.

The exponential growth of knowledge makes every decade a watershed in human history with the submission of Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Ralzen, Ripley, Miller-Ricci and Rumble (2011). Humanity's life and destiny, their meaning and purpose are perhaps more than what this mode of knowledge comprises, but without this knowledge surge in history, mankind surely would have been so much less. The sense of progress in life of mankind owes much, possibly all, to the phenomenon of growing, deepening and exploding knowledge according to Dede, Korte, Nelson, Valdez and Ward (2005).

Education is central to the knowledge based society because it is the human being who is the creator, the preserver and sometimes tragically, the destroyer of knowledge. A knowledge based society is one that derives so much from human potential. It is an open society because it is not about how men think and create and become free. Its core is thinking, creativity, and inventiveness for effectiveness.

The submission is not different from Obanya (2014) that in the 21st century, machines had replaced labor in the industrial area; information technology has become the source of codified knowledge economy, demanding uniquely human skills such as conceptual, interpersonal and communication skills.

The 21st Century Economy

The 20th century according to Houghton and Sheeben (2000) can be considered as the cruelest period in the entire history of mankind for what man has done to man and continues to do. Also for what man has done to the future generations by what he has done and continues to do to the environment. It is a new world characterized by uncertainty, as the rapid changes taking place have become highly unpredictable and competitive. The 21st century was also predicted by Houghton and Sheeben (2000) to be the period unique and beyond compare, for the human achievements in knowledge where emphasis will be placed on the knowledge worker. This is learning individual who continuously searching and applying knowledge, versatile team player with lot more than strictly academic and technical skills.

The 21st century according to Turiman, Omar, MohdDaud and Osman (2012) offers life in a borderless world where the world of work is characterized by personal qualities rather than qualifications. The rapid development of technology and information dissemination will result in the expansion of knowledge that will impact the economy, culture and politics of a country. Current explosion of information and technology and knowledge-based economy have changed the implementation of the education system. The era of digital economy as proclaimed by NCREL and Metri group (2003) requires a workforce that is knowledgeable and skilled to generate innovation and improve productivity of a country.

Education for Change

Globally, we are in a knowledge based society in which the central capital is knowledge. Bertrand de Jouvenel (1967) makes the case that “if society tends on the whole to conserve the present state of affairs, our present knowledge has a high chance of being valid in the future. On the other hand, the future validity of our knowledge becomes increasingly doubtful as the mode of society incline towards change, and the changes promise to be more rapid. Furthermore, Mustapha and Abdullah (2004) noted that it should be added that the perception of future-time has almost no role in a situation where neither knowledge nor societal state is subject to change.

Change then is a decisively defining element in the choices that may be made in future possibilities. Moreover, a society that remains rooted in its “present state of affairs and its present knowledge cannot subsist in isolation in the fast changing knowledge world of today, however hard it may try. The ongoing technological, social and developmental changes will sweep the cocooned society into a future state of affairs without choice or control of its destiny, as passive recipient and not on active agent.

In emphasizing the need for future oriented development of education, one is attempting to respond to changes or crises as they occur, or more often, after they have occurred. The image of education as a “conservative” force refers to this passive-reactive functioning of the education systems rather than to the element of continuity by conserving what is worthy. The reactive education policies and practices have in a high degree a tendency to homogenize and to stress “behavioral objectives” focused on the individual. On the other hand, the future-oriented education is actively promoter of innovation and dynamically evolving social goals.

The future is not some place we are going to, it is the one we are creating. Creation implies a vision and choice. It defines knowledge as no longer is it sufficient that to know is only to distill from the past but to know is also to question and to exercise choice and discernment about the future and to act accordingly. However according to a popular Latin saying, “*tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*”, meaning that time change, and we change with them, or more precisely, the times are changed and we changed in them or during them. According to Obanya (2003), the educational system in Nigeria as at the beginning of the 21st century cannot play the role of prime mover of political and socio-economic development.

Therefore something drastic has to be done, and urgently too, to remedy the situation and to reposition the education sector to play its prime role as a positive tool for genuine human development. A development oriented positive change is therefore needed, and this would require;

1. Improved funding of education
2. Laying a solid foundation for educational development in terms of more responsive policy postures.
3. Making the foundation stage of education compulsory and taking urgent steps to generalize access, to improve quality, equity, and efficiency, thus respecting Nigeria’s commitment to the international goals of education for all.
4. Progressively expanding facilities and improving quality at all levels of education.
5. Vigorously promoting functional literacy, with a view to massively reduce the incidence of illiteracy by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, and
6. Making educational programs more closely related to moral and civic life, as well as to the world of work.
7. Education should tend towards being able to communicate, share, and use information to solve complex problems, in being able to adapt and innovative in response to new demands and changing circumstances, in being able to marshal and expand the power of technology to create new knowledge, and in expanding human capacity and productivity.
8. Education should not be concerned with “knowing book” but in helping an individual to “grow” in the sense of all round development and positive change in behavior through;
 - Gender responsive practices
 - Special needs support services
 - Advisory and guidance support services
 - Special attention to students learning difficulties
 - Demonstration of empathy (towards learner) by all teachers

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